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The Sussex Campus ‘Forever Strike’: Estrangement, Resistance and Utopian Temporality

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Abstract

The 2018 strike undertaken by academics working in the UK was the largest called in University and College Union history, lasting for fourteen days over four weeks, with 88% of members voting for strike action across sixty-four universities.¹ This article explores how the campus at the University of Sussex during the time of this strike became a strange, conflicted and transformative space; both a heterotopia and a site for a critical utopian process, where norms can be bent and broken, where people can function outside of the normal rules and disciplinary technologies of contemporary academia.² The picket lines were supplemented by strike supporting events, teach-ins, teach-outs, occupations, marches, workshops and socials; linking it with debates on the public university, decolonizing the curriculum. The strike action reached beyond the pensions debate and demonstrated radical utopian potential.

The article considers how moments of estrangement are created in the learning space of the picket, whose strangeness and otherness, in comparison to a class room, allowed participants to open up to new ideas.³ Estrangement enforces a reduction of hierarchy and creation of community essential to establishing what Giroux might view as a critical pedagogy that tries to resist modes of cultural reproduction.⁴ This actively changes how time is experienced on campus: slowing down, allowing for contemplation, opening up different experiences of the ‘Now’. Ultimately this article considers how the struggle is far from over either off or on campus. On Sussex campus, the strike songs are still heard on Library square, meetings are ongoing, the UCU and student groups are taking forward their manifesto for change, while beyond Sussex, there has been disruption to established democratic processes at both the National Union of Students National Conference and the UCU Congress this year. Strike action has contributed to a process of revealing new potentials both within and beyond the campus.

Keywords: Protest; Higher education; Utopian studies; Union

¹ University and College Union. “UCU Announces 14 Strike Dates at 61 Universities in Pensions Row”(29 January 2018). <https://www.ucu.org.uk/14-strike-dates>

² Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”, tr. Jay Miskowiec. *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (19 Oct 1984): 2.

³ Ernst Bloch et. al. “‘Entfremdung, Verfremdung’: Alienation, Estrangement.” *TDR* 15, no. 1 (1970): 120–25.

⁴ Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011): 5 - 6.

Introduction

The 2018 University and Colleges Union (UCU) strike was the largest called in UK Higher Education history, lasting for fourteen days over four weeks, with 88% of members who turned out voting for strike action across sixty-four universities.⁵ Strike action followed the proposal by Universities UK (UUK) to end the guaranteed pension scheme, impacting tens of thousands of university staff pensions. The proposals threatened to change the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) from a defined benefit scheme which gives a guaranteed retirement income. It would have become a defined contribution scheme, where the value of the pensions are floated on the stock market. The picket lines were supplemented by strike supporting events, teach-ins, teach-outs, occupations, marches, workshops and socials. These linked the strike with debates on the public university, decolonising the curriculum, and reached beyond the pensions debate revealing a radical utopian potential. This article explores how the campus at the University of Sussex during the time of the 2018 pensions strike became a strange, conflicted and transformative space. It is explored both as a heterotopia and a site for a critical utopian process, where norms can be bent and broken, where people can function outside of normal rules and disciplinary technologies.⁶

Viewing the strike as a heterotopian space helps to formulate the spaces specifically in terms of how resistance operates within them. It shows how spaces can be used in a sustainable way to challenge societal ‘norms’ and dominant orders. Through application of the different dimensions of heterotopia in a diagnostic way, in the case study of the Strike on Sussex Campus, we can begin to see its value as a tool for identifying how different spaces work and realising the contradictions and opportunities for resistance within them.

The article also considers how moments of estrangement are created in the learning space of the picket. The strangeness and otherness compared to a classroom provide an ideal environment for opening up to new ideas.⁷ Estrangement enforces a reduction of hierarchy and creation of community essential to establishing a critical pedagogy that tries to resist modes of cultural reproduction.⁸ This actively changes how time is experienced on campus, slowing down, allowing for contemplation, opening up different experiences of the ‘Now’. Ultimately it considers how the struggle is far from over either off or on campus, and how strike action has contributed to a process of revealing new potentials both within and beyond the campus.

Method and Theory

This philosophical inquiry into the strike action on the University of Sussex campus is based on discourse from a broad base of evidence. This includes news articles, university press releases, social media feeds, the team who organised the strike events programme, participant observation, emails, legislation and policy documents on striking, and documentation from UCU Sussex and University of Sussex Students’ Union. It is worth noting that while participant observation can be helpful to the understanding of assumptions, motivations and processes of social movements, there are particular limits and ethics considerations to such work.⁹ Each person brings with them their own subjectively constructed experiences of the strike action.

⁵ University and College Union. “UCU Announces 14 Strike Dates at 61 Universities in Pensions Row” (29 January 2018). <https://www.ucu.org.uk/14-strike-dates>

⁶ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”, tr. Jay Miskowiec. *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (19 Oct 1984): 2.

⁷ Ernst Bloch et. al. ““Entfremdung, Verfremdung”: Alienation, Estrangement.” *TDR* 15, no. 1 (1970): 120–25.

⁸ Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011): 5 - 6.

⁹ Julie Uldam and Patrick McCurdy, “Studying Social Movements: Challenges and Opportunities for Participant Observation,” *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 11 (November 2013): 941-951.

One must be respectful of those who did not mean to be the subject of research through their actions, not to identify or incriminate them, or to wildly misconstrue or undermine their actions. These observations have been written in conversation with a number of participants, and this study is indebted to those who continue to be in dialogue on this topic, providing a critical discursive exterior to the process of writing on this struggle.

As an insider researcher and strike participant, I am acutely aware that engagement with forms of knowledge production such as the writing of journal articles itself can be deemed problematic or unethical in these contexts. Through the participation in the marketiseable processes of education, and the use of strike time and efforts for what could be deemed as paid research work, there is a risk of undermining the spirit and the effort of the action itself. The act of writing must therefore take on a necessarily resistant form for the critical utopian researcher: one that strives to counteract this pressure with a politics of unveiling perspectives on the strike that point towards catalysing influences, transformational politics, and contribute towards an educated hope:¹⁰ one that is both critical and grounded in potentiality. On the subject of what utopian theory brings to critical theory, Ellis and Tucker note in their writing on the subject of what utopian theory brings to critical theory, this is “a version of critique that is more utopic than purely critical: a move beyond deconstruction towards a forward-facing and open re-construction.”¹¹ Here the researcher-observer position contains a normative bias towards the possibility of a ‘better world’, while also trying to locate this possibility in the way in which relations of power and historical context place limits on its possible constitution.

As such, this article uses an open form of critical discourse analysis, where the framework for analysis is an entanglement of Foucault’s ‘heterotopia’ and Bloch’s utopian theory which is grounded in a critique of the now. Heterotopia literally means ‘other places’¹² and is a space in society where the norms can be bent and broken, where people can function outside of the normal rules and technologies of discipline.¹³ Foucault’s concept of heterotopia gives us a way to explore spaces where relations of power and knowledge operate differently from the rest of society. He views it as a space that acts as a reflective surface to show society new things about itself. In Bloch’s process-based utopian theory, the utopian process is a critical engagement that results in the possibility to move towards a ‘better world’.¹⁴ Here it is used as a discursive exterior to the concept of heterotopia, giving an ethical aspect to this spatial-temporal notion.

In this adapted framework of Foucault’s heterotopia, a feature of these spaces must be the location of a utopian process. Firstly, they must be working with a collective ethics towards the idea of a better world, and secondly, they must be critical spaces that allow for conflict and change.¹⁵ This can be used to counter the main criticism of heterotopias being so open that they become banal, that anything ‘different’ may be a heterotopia, or that some heterotopian spaces are indeed not spaces of resistance but spaces that are ‘closed, exclusionary and even threatening’.¹⁶ In particular the utopian process created through moments of ‘estrangement’¹⁷ is explored as the personal transformative force within this space.

¹⁰ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* ed. Plaice and Knight, vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995); Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹¹ Darren Ellis and Ian Tucker, “Virtuality and Ernst Bloch: Hope and Subjectivity,” *Subjectivity* 4, no. 4 (2011): 447.

¹² Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”

¹³ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 3 - 9.

¹⁴ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, x - xii.

¹⁵ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, i - xxi.

¹⁶ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000): 182 - 84.

¹⁷ Bloch et. al., “Entfremdung, Verfremdung.”

Finally, this piece must be considered both in and of the moment in which it is written, where there has been a short period for reflection, when the echoes of the action are still strong, and the conflict still ongoing. The moment of writing on such action becomes part of the utopian process. Immediately it is a document of the past that contextualises potential future actions, however, it is also blinded to itself by the proximity to the darkness of the lived moment. Here we are ‘located in our own blind spot’¹⁸ unable to fully comprehend how the actions that have just happened will impact future events, and how they have impacted us. As such, this research is at risk of both abstraction and misrepresentation if it fails to state its own limitations. This article aims to capture some elements of the strike which Bloch would refer to as the ‘collective daydream’¹⁹ of the strike: the actions, debates and ideas that when expressed may lead to constructive change. However, this is limited by my personal encounters, and by the need for anonymisation and respect for participants, which limits the choice of actions and relations discussed. It does not claim to, and indeed could not, represent all views or experiences of such a multifaceted event, particularly one in which conflict is a fundamental part of its nature, and in which the transformation of perspective is a notable outcome.

Heterotopias of Crisis and Deviation: Fighting for the Public University and Making Visible the Undercommons

By their definition, all heterotopias are either in a state of crisis, a state of deviation, or a combination of the two.²⁰ Despite the privileged nature of the university itself, subsets of the university community can today be read as being in a ‘crisis heterotopia’ before the strike action even took place. Through the neoliberal process of the marketisation of education and cultures of managerialism, students and staff in higher education occupy a place of vulnerability and precarity. Zero hour and fixed term contracts are increasingly prevalent, the proportion of teaching-only academics on permanent contracts fell from 64% in 1995-96 to 40% in 2002-03,²¹ and by 2016 54% of all academic staff and 49% of all academic teaching staff were on insecure contracts.²² We have seen the closing down of humanities departments across the country.²³ The Higher Education Act (2004) enabled universities to set their own tuition fees,²⁴ or ‘variable tuition costs’, and these were introduced from academic year 2006 to 2007. A vote in 2011 following the Browne Report and subsequent white paper allowed fee increases up to £9000. This legislation has opened the sector to a quasi-marketplace, introducing marketplace competition, but at the same time putting it under the heavy scrutiny of a managerial approach that requires public accountability.²⁵

Proposed changes to the pension cuts would mean a typical UCU member stood to see their retirement income reduced by £10,000 a year. Younger staff members were likely to be hit the hardest, with some standing to lose around half their pensions. These cuts

¹⁸ Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, 200

¹⁹ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 91 - 93

²⁰ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 4

²¹ Association of University Teachers. “The Unequal Academy: UK Academic Staff 1995–96 to 2002–03” (October 2004): 18.

²² University and College Union, “Precarious Work in Higher Education: A Snapshot of Insecure Contracts and Institutional Attitudes” (April 2016): 1.

²³ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, updated ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

²⁴ Higher Education Act 2004 c. 8.Pt 3.

²⁵ Mike Molesworth, ed., *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2010): 28 - 31.

disproportionately impacted groups already oppressed on grounds of race and gender.²⁶ This is indicative of a university system that is still inherently dominated by a white male middle class, an institution that is still racist and exclusionary. Indicatively, there were only 25 black women and 90 black men among 19,000 professors in 2016-17 academic year.²⁷ Such statistics do little to capture structural discriminatory practices, and differential experiences within the workplace. Where the inclusion of women and minorities in leading management and research positions has been limited, there has been little progress on addressing the feminised and racial division of work in universities.²⁸ Those who were to be worst hit by the changes to the pension schemes were those already most oppressed and excluded by the institution.

Webb notes that to form a utopian response to the corporate-imperial university, it is necessary to find spaces of 'resistance, reconstruction and utopian possibility'.²⁹ One of these spaces is what Harney and Moten define as the 'undercommons' of the university, a figurative space defined by subversive academics who are negatively impacted and actively opposed to the managerialised, marketised and discriminatory circumstances within which they are forced to operate. This undercommons is seen as something both essential and threatening by the institution of the university:

The university needs what she [the subversive academic] bears but cannot bear what she brings. And on top of all that, she disappears. She disappears into the underground, the downlow lowdown maroon community of the university, into the undercommons of enlightenment, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.³⁰

Undercommons' occupation of space within the academy is likened by Harney and Moten to refugee or maroon communities. Academics in these situations are reduced to stealing what they can from the administration in the form of grants, time and resources.³¹ For the purposes of this debate, I wish also to include many different students in this group as part of the university academic community: those who are actively critical, members of political groups or activist societies on campus, and some of those who hold elected roles at the Students' Union or are actively involved in student politics.

Harney and Moten state that 'it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment'.³² The university is a space that both encourages and stifles criticism, too often encouraging a performativity of criticism without its practice. We see examples of this in performance management, workload models, student engagement practices, staff consultation meetings, and other feedback processes. Students are encouraged to fill in surveys, participate in focus groups or give informal feedback as forms of course criticism. However, this orchestrated engagement with

²⁶ cambridgeucuaction, "Pensions as an Equality and Diversity Issue," *Cambridge UCU 2018 Industrial Action* (blog), April 15, 2018, <https://cambridgeucuaction.wordpress.com/2018/04/15/pensions-as-an-equality-and-diversity-issue/>.

²⁷ University and College Union, "The Position of Women and BME Staff in Professorial Roles in UK HEIs". UCU Publications, January 2013.

²⁸ Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, "Sensing Dispossession: Women and Gender Studies between Institutional Racism and Migration Control Policies in the Neoliberal University," *Women's Studies International Forum* 54 (1 January 2016): 167–77.

²⁹ Darren Webb, "Bolt-Holes and Breathing Spaces in the System: On Forms of Academic Resistance (or, Can the University Be a Site of Utopian Possibility?)," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 40, no. 2 (15 March 2018): 96–118.

³⁰ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, England: Minor Compositions, 2013): 26.

³¹ Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 33.

³² Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 1.

permitted forms of criticism is limited with respect to the topics people can give feedback on, and the public nature of many of these critiques limits the risks people take with their opinions.³³ Such critiques fail to have a practical application; they are contained and sanitised, failing to capture commentary on intersectional oppression. The strike action, when seen as one of deviation, is arguably emergent to some extent from university undercommons, a space of crisis that is 'privileged, sacred and forbidden'.³⁴ The strike then creates a newly legitimised heterotopia of deviation for 'individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm'.³⁵

This heterotopia becomes a mixture of crisis and deviation. Teach-ins at the Students' Union reflected the anger around not just the pensions but many different issues dealing with intersectional discrimination. Talks included 'Race in the Neoliberal Academy', featuring Dr Naaz Rashid, Dr Nadya Ali and Dr Malcolm James discussing issues around access, representation and experience alongside policies around immigration; another was entitled 'The Strike is Not Friendly: A Decolonial History of Labour Disputes' by Dr Akanksha Mehta and Dr Nadya Ali; and 'Decolonizing Transnational Feminism: Not All Women's Genitals Are Pink (or Pussies)' by Dr Jocelyn M. Boryczka.³⁶ A number of talks discussed the counter-terrorism legislation, specifically the Prevent guidance, critiquing its implementation as both racist and Islamophobic, and other workshops took place in relation to anti-racist organising and the BAME Gap. This attack on pensions changed the context in which some of the undercommons was working from hidden to visible. This invokes the second principle of heterotopia: here, a discriminatory history makes the 'existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion'.³⁷

This legitimised space of strike action was dependent on the first national ballot on strike action since the new laws on voting quotas were introduced by the Trade Union Bill (2016). One of the major concerns about these new participation thresholds for voting was that rather than encouraging participation, they may indeed discourage it.³⁸ Those opposed to a ballot would potentially have far greater influence by not voting, than by voting 'No', as disengaging could mean that the 50% threshold would never be met, and thus the 'Yes' votes would never be counted. However, despite fears about reaching this new target set by this bill,³⁹ turnout across all institutions averaged at a record high above 58%, of which 88% voted for strike action.⁴⁰ On Sussex campus the turnout was above average at 61.7%, with 91.6% voting in favour of strike action.⁴¹ This significant vote not only set the conditions for a legal strike to happen, but also opened up the space on campus for other actions that were visible and provocative. The Trade Union Bill links the strike action with the normalised spaces of the rest of society, constructing the space through order and resistance through using the law. Through a legally recognised strike, the space on campus was primed for action for all UCU member employees

³³ Bruce Macfarlane, *Freedom to Learn: The Threat to Student Academic Freedom and Why It Needs to Be Reclaimed* (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

³⁴ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 5.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Timetable of Strike Events" (Sussex Strike Events, February 2018).

³⁷ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 5.

³⁸ Ruth Dukes and Nicola Kountouris, "Pre-Strike Ballots, Picketing and Protest: Banning Industrial Action by the Back Door?," *Industrial Law Journal* 45, no. 3 (1 September 2016): 337–62.

³⁹ Alan Bogg, "Beyond Neo-Liberalism: The Trade Union Act 2016 and the Authoritarian State," *Industrial Law Journal* 45, no. 3 (1 September 2016): 299–336; K. D. Ewing and John Hendy QC, "The Trade Union Act 2016 and the Failure of Human Rights," *Industrial Law Journal* 45, no. 3 (1 September, 2016): 391–422, <https://doi.org/10.1093/indlaw/dww027>.

⁴⁰ University and College Union. "USS Ballot Results Announced," 22 January 2018. Accessed 23 June 2018. <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/9195/USS-ballot-results-announced>.

⁴¹ University and College Union. "USS Ballot Results Announced."

and others also on the USS pension scheme, which changed the dynamic of the undercommons community and reconfigured the space for the time of the strike.

Previously it would be the case that those in the undercommons 'are always at war, always in hiding,'⁴² but the strike action on campus changed this, and brought some of this undercommons to the surface, legitimised its exposure, and through this deviant revelation both extended its reach and demonstrated its extent. This heterotopian space of deviation, the strike action, is closer in proximity to the 'real space of society'⁴³ than those of crisis heterotopias. As such it is more visible and more accessible for others to join. Crisis heterotopias see groups of staff and students resisting in more perilous ways within their departments in day to day subversive activity, where they are not striking in the protected space formed and held by the Trade Union Act. Strike action involved an organised deviation of many staff from their normal activities in order to make visible this space of crisis on campus, and provide a protected space of resistance, a heterotopia of deviation within, or overlapping one of crisis. Staff who were already active in their different modes of resistance, in particular via UCU but also beyond, became highly visible in campus actions.

However, Webb posits that while this language of the undercommons is seductive, one must not forget there is a real danger, a threat of loss of employment or status, or bullying and disdain from others, when putting such ideas into practice.⁴⁴ It is worth noting also that during the strike, international staff and students were made particularly vulnerable due to the conditions of their visas, and the limitations placed unauthorised absences. The undercommons of the university, during strike time or otherwise, is not a safe space. It is fraught and precarious, meaning that it is often hard to perceive or realise this potential utopia in everyday practice.

A Broader Purpose: In Defence of the Public University

Professor Gurminder Bhambra, professor of postcolonial and decolonial studies at Sussex spoke at one of the teach-out sessions delivered in the Students' Union during the strike 'In Defence of the Public University'.⁴⁵ Here she reiterated comments from an article she had published on the strike:

The public university is a repository of the collective learning of communities... we must maintain its function for the public, for a critically informed public sphere, for the deepening of democracy. In defending our pensions, we are defending all of the above and defending the social democratic gains of the last half century which are being systematically dismantled, and struggling for more.⁴⁶

Strike action on one campus for the purpose of defending pensions should not be viewed in isolation. The attack on pensions was entangled with the erosion of the public university. The pension scheme is one for which all institutions remain collectively responsible, which means that if one fails, then assets of others could potentially be used to protect the pensions to their staff.⁴⁷ Defending the USS pensions scheme was seen as a way of defending collectivism in

⁴² Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 30.

⁴³ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 3.

⁴⁴ Webb, "Bolt-Holes and Breathing Spaces in the System", 104.

⁴⁵ "Timetable of Strike Events" (Sussex Strike Events, February 2018).

⁴⁶ Gurminder K Bhambra, "In Defence of the Public University: The USS Strike in Context." *Discover Society* (23 February 2018) <https://discoversociety.org/2018/02/23/in-defence-of-the-public-university-the-uss-strike-in-context/>.

⁴⁷ Benjamin S P Davis, *Hope For Something Better: University Strikes 2018.*, accessed June 26, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Tr5kBPMSwI&feature=youtu.be>; Bhambra, "In Defence of the Public University"; Mark Bergfeld, "'Do You Believe in Life after Work?' The University and College Union Strike in Britain." *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* (10 May 2018).

universities, and protecting staff in an era of market reform. Its maintenance has therefore become symbolic of resistance to the processes of marketisation, and it is one of the few remaining collective features of the public university system.⁴⁸ The strike action itself reaches towards a better world that does not just protect workers' pensions, but reaches into a pre-consciousness⁴⁹ of a reimagined education sector: one that resists the marketisation and managerialised restrictions that are currently at play. The strike action is not just about the pension scheme but the principles under which it was constructed. The strike is about the ethical idea of a better world, and critical spaces that allow for conflict and change.

As it progressed, this strike was increasingly seen as part of resisting a bigger crisis, one that impacted both staff and students as interconnected groups in a shared yet splintered 'now'. The talk Professor Bhambra gave had a direct impact on how students organised their actions on Sussex campus, and inspired a student group of activists who began planning action to support the strike, and other connected struggles.⁵⁰ On the seventh of March at the main picket line at Sussex there was a meeting on the line to start student-staff discussions on a 'Manifesto for Solidarity' to be presented to the University that reaches beyond the outcomes of the strike. The Student Strike Movement stated: 'As a group we are seeking to support you in the strikes as much as possible because of their importance in fighting UUK's attack on your pensions and the general trend of marketisation and commodification of universities which this represents.'⁵¹ This event was shared via email and social media by UCU staff who encouraged staff attendance.

A heterotopia functions best when it achieves a break with traditional time.⁵² In this case we may read this as a break from the imposed managerial time of the university for staff, or for students their scheduled timetables and lessons. Meetings such as this can be read as an attempt to unite this nonhegemonic timespace on campus: they replace a model of time based on conflict between staff and students in the provider-consumer relationship with an alternative, united time that is radically utopian in nature. Here 'the rigid divisions between the past and future thus collapse'⁵³ in order to disrupt the static perceptions of the here and now. There is a much needed attempt to overcome misunderstandings, and an of acknowledgement of the shared advantages for staff and students of having a workforce that was fairly reimbursed.

The demands of this group were to include: a more democratic and transparent approach to governance of the university; a focus on improving staff diversity; decolonising the curriculum; greater recognition of academic freedom; action on attainment gaps; different approaches to flexible working; resistance to the Prevent Duty; caps on student rent prices and democratic student involvement in running university accommodation; staff pay ratios or pay caps; and a reversal of poorly managed outsourced contracts. This meeting was intended to be the first step in broader and sustained action that the students were to take on these issues. Through this utopian act within the heterotopia, the students created a new possible reality. It posited new iterations of community with new aesthetics, rules and demands codified within a broad framework of social issues. This extended the heterotopia of the campus on strike into a potentially infinite heterochrony (as opposed to one that was brief and 'festival like') of a struggle against a variety of injustices.

⁴⁸ Bhambra, "In Defence of the Public University."

⁴⁹ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 115.

⁵⁰ Student Activist, "Staff-Student Solidarity & Manifesto Meeting," March 5, 2018.

⁵¹ Student Activist.

⁵² Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 6.

⁵³ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 8.

Boundaries and Gestures on the Picket Line

The picket line is of particular significance in the space of the striking university. It can be seen as forming the boundary of this heterotopia of the campus on strike. It is a permeable border, however it is also a liminal space where activity happens, a site of struggle, conflict, solidarity and celebration. The picket line is governed by certain rules. It must obey the internal processes of each UCU branch, but also the additional requirements under the Trade Union Act of 2016,⁵⁴ and the subsequent Code of Picketing released in March 2017.⁵⁵ These new laws have been criticised for narrowing the freedom of workers and trade unions to participate in and organise industrial action, and for unnecessary surveillance requirements.⁵⁶

The picket lines at the University of Sussex covered four different entrances to the University Campus and latterly a fifth for the Institute for Development Studies. Each of these pickets were required by the code to have named picket supervisors in place, and the locations of each picket were released in advance. These pickets were not spontaneous, but planned events, and required communication with the university. The permeable boundaries of the heterotopia are bound by requirements that define its relationship to the rest of society.⁵⁷ Here, the Trade Union Act 2016 attempts to limit the permitted gestures of protest. By doing so it imposes not only on how the heterotopia can construct its own boundaries, in this case aiming to make them totally permeable, but also on how the subjects of the pickets construct themselves. The *Code of Picketing* specifies that those on the picket line can explain their case; ask people not to enter or leave where the dispute is taking place by speaking; distribute leaflets and carry banners or placards. The picket has no power under the law to stop people from crossing or compelling them to listen.⁵⁸ As such, there was a stationary element to these picket lines, limitations to behaviours, actions and even gestures.

The etymology of gesture comes from the Latin *gerere*, to carry or conduct. Gestures can be seen to 'encode, express, and perpetuate the values of specific historical and cultural formations'.⁵⁹ For Foucault, gestures are actions controlled and constructed by the disciplinary apparatus of society, and also actions through which we construct ourselves and resist such apparatus.⁶⁰ Butler notes that gestures on a demonstration are part of the performative act of protest, one aspect of how we can act together in demonstration that 'opens up time and space outside and against the established architecture and temporality of the regime'.⁶¹ These limited gestures also relate to the individual body; it is not just the organising work of the union but the infinitesimal movements and actions of picketers that are being controlled by this code of practice. It does not just prevent physical violence against people or places, but defines the terms on which they speak in detail. They can 'ask' or 'explain' but not compel people to listen. This creates a boundary of anxiety over the law at the very point of one-to-one human interaction, interactions that are often only momentary as people walk across the picket line.

⁵⁴ Trade Union Act 2016 c. 15. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/15/pdfs/ukpga_20160015_en.pdf. s 10

⁵⁵ "Code of Practice on Picketing." Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, March 2017, 10.

⁵⁶ Ruth Dukes and Nicola Kountouris, "Pre-Strike Ballots, Picketing and Protest: Banning Industrial Action by the Back Door?" *Industrial Law Journal* 45, no. 3 (1 September 2016): 337.

⁵⁷ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces".

⁵⁸ "Code of Practice on Picketing", 10.

⁵⁹ Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness, eds., *Migrations of Gesture* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2008): ix-xx.

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 2001): 194 - 228.

⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015): 75.

That which is allowed becomes only a ‘technique of minute variations’⁶² that serve to limit creativity and revolutionary potential. The ‘worry of the productive human’⁶³ caused by such minute interventions serves as a form of social control. From a Foucauldian perspective we can read this as the creation of a picket line of docile bodies, the anxiety of breaking the *Code of Practice* serves to create a workforce that is obedient in its necessary resistance as well as disciplined in its working practices.⁶⁴

It may seem that picket lines are thus made completely permeable by Trade Union law. However, while “[e]veryone can enter into the heterotopic sites, [...] in fact that is only an illusion—we think we enter, but by the very fact that we enter, we are excluded.”⁶⁵ On the campus at Sussex, it was observable that many of those entering the campus to go to work and study during strike days were experiencing this exclusion. While many students came out in support of the strike, we can also read this heterotopian space as being a negative and uncomfortable experience for many. The cancellation of classes, assessments and supervision placed students in a in a potential state of crisis, despite assurances from management that students would not be disadvantaged by the strike action.⁶⁶ Certainly many of those passing through the picket line felt a sense of discomfort, no matter how docile the bodies forming the picket were required to be. Some students felt that the legal right to picketing should be revoked as it was too confrontational, as demonstrated in the article ‘What Gives Them the Right,’ written by a Sussex student.⁶⁷ This article also assumed that students could picket, despite the exclusion of students (who were not also employees of the university) from picketing by law, showing a general lack of understanding within the student body of how the strike action operated and the different roles that staff and students could play in the resistance.⁶⁸

It is not just physical space but the intersection of time and space that defines this heterotopia. Those coming onto campus to participate in the normal academic time of classes and work were not entering the heterotopian space. Picket lines were a liminal space of waiting and deliberating, flurries of activities where attention would be sent outwards, when students and staff poured off a bus or train, with a turning inwards to other picketers to discuss and reflect once people had passed and the boundary was once more untroubled. In addition students pass in and out of the pickets even if they are not attending classes, passing through to reach student halls or the campus shop. This implies a complex non-linearity of time, not a single narrative of progress but a multifaceted and ever moving struggle.

Consideration of the nonhegemonic timespace on campus allows us to recognise, not just how the heterotopian space includes, but also how it excludes people who are outside its timespace of resistance. Bloch explains how we all exist in differing ‘Nows’, subjected to different temporal restrictions that are impacted in intersectional ways through being part of different temporal stories and structures. These may relate to many issues such as social status, gender, race and age.⁶⁹ The different ‘Nows’ were identifiable in teach-ins/outs where students in support of the strike engaged with issues that impact the quality of their education today,

⁶² Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, 167.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New ed. (London: Penguin, 1991): 135.

⁶⁵ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 7 - 8.

⁶⁶ Adam Tickell, “Email to All Students - Important Information about Your Classes and Assessment,” 19 February 2018, <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/students/unionaction2018/communications>.

⁶⁷ Emily Hume, “The Sussex picket line is cutting off the entire campus – what gives them the right?” *The Tab*, 23 February 2018. <https://thetab.com/uk/sussex/2018/02/23/the-sussex-picket-line-is-cutting-off-the-entire-campus-what-gives-them-the-right-25462>

⁶⁸ Trade Union Act 2016 c. 15; “Code of Practice on Picketing,” 6.

⁶⁹ Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* (Breinigsville, PA USA: Polity, 2009): 109 - 114.

politics of anti-capitalism and decolonising the curriculum.⁷⁰ In meetings they also spoke about the bigger picture of how this strike action links with the other issues of the loss of the public university, how marketisation impacts rent prices on campus, issues of racism, poverty and lack of diversity.⁷¹ Staff on the pickets also debated their concerns with this immediacy, but the row on pensions makes vulnerable not only their present positions, but places their future in crisis. Individuals themselves were experiencing a fracturing of the ‘Nows’ in which they existed as they considered the different issues at play in the conflict.

Some staff were unable to participate in the strike, left in the managerial time as members of a different union. Some students were still attending classes, focused on their studies, politically disinterested, or merely disengaged from the action altogether. Others did not support the strike, while some felt too vulnerable to strike for fear of impact on their employment, or were in precarious financial situations and unable to suffer a loss of wages, and therefore found themselves in different immediacy of inertia. This process of exclusion can undoubtedly read as unfair by those who were in principle supportive of the strike but were, due to their personal circumstances, unable to participate. Self-funded students, a high number of which would be those on MA courses, may be more reluctant to sacrifice learning time to support strike action as it would come at a higher personal and academic cost. As mentioned previously, those on Tier 2 visas were at particular risk, as there were concerns raised regarding uncertainty around deportation risks for international staff. This can be similarly extended to international students, who are subject to attendance monitoring. Staff members with dependants would be likely suffer more by the loss of wages, those on low wages and part-time contracts in particular. The decision to participate in the strike as a staff member, or to support the strike as a student, was not an easy one. There were disproportionately high sacrifices for those most vulnerable that were practical as well as emotional.

It is not just that there are rules which govern the organisation and behaviour on the picket lines. There must also be certain permissions and gestures for staff to take part on the picket line. Non-union members on strike are protected from dismissal and have the same rights as union members, as long as the industrial action is lawful.⁷² However, in order to take part in the strike, many staff members felt they would have greater protection as members of UCU, and this became a gesture of the strike. The UCU Sussex branch saw a dramatic increase in members who wanted to participate in the strike without putting their jobs in jeopardy. Membership at Sussex grew to over 1000 members⁷³ from a base of 655 at the time of the January ballot.⁷⁴ We can see staff adopting certain behaviours, in particular union membership, in order to participate in the strike on the campus, whether through presence or absence.

The exclusion of students from the actual picket lines did not prevent joint working between the UCU and Students’ Union on campus. There were varying forms of student protest in solidarity. The group of student protestors who organised through the Students’ Union were prone to far more spontaneous action, existing, as they did, in a different, and less regulated ‘Now’ from the staff protestors on the picket lines. Their agency was spontaneous and involved marches, occupations of a building site and of Sussex House, where the management of the University work.

⁷⁰ “Timetable of Strike Events.”

⁷¹ Student Activist, “Staff-Student Solidarity & Manifesto Meeting”; “Timetable of Strike Events.”

⁷² Trade Union Act 2016 c.15.

⁷³ Chris Chatwin, “[UCU EC] Member Numbers,” 13 March 2018.

⁷⁴ Electoral Reform Services. “Independent Scrutineers Report: University of Sussex - USS Ballot Result.” 19 January 2018. https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9085/University-of-Sussex---USS-ballot-result-Jan-18/pdf/University_of_Sussex_-_USS_ballot_result_-_Jan18.pdf.

By staging additional protests that intersected with the UCU protests, students changed and redefined the areas of the strike action, enforcing new boundaries within boundaries, and even symbolically locating the presence of the picket in front of the library, rather than at the boundary, with signs that said “by entering the library you are crossing the picket line”.⁷⁵ By law, staff had to picket on defined picket lines, with specified UCU stewards; students had greater freedom within the law to move around campus, enter buildings and act as a moving boundary and presence in different areas from the staff. However, actions which happened alongside the strike, such as the occupation of East Slope on campus, were deemed unlawful due to the use of private laws of trespass applied to quasi-public spaces.⁷⁶

Marching students carried banners that helped other students understand how they could support the strike, with slogans such as 'Back to Bed for UCU'. Their marches round campus defied the picket action's boundaries, carrying out acts that would be illegal for picketing staff, such as blocking the road when buses came, which would constitute an inducement to secondary action under the *Code of Practice for Picketing*.⁷⁷ These protest marches reinforced the strike space, joined the isolated picket spaces together, and fortified staff on the picket lines with chants of solidarity. These marches can be read as a heterotopias, occupying a different physical space and temporal rhythm from the pickets. They happened on and off several times a day during the strike action and were spaces of celebration, often timed to end at the main picket line in time for a teach-out or other event. These ‘slices of time’⁷⁸ can be read as precarious and momentary, they have a revolutionary agency due to their ephemeral nature that cannot be policed and controlled by the picketing code of practice.

Spaces of Estrangement – the Utopian Function

The state of crisis and flux caused by the strike action on campus opens up and actively encourages critique. The time of crisis changes the familiar space into something altogether different. Estrangement allows for the critical utopian process to take place. When Bloch discusses Brecht's concept of estrangement, he speaks of the displacement of a character or action out of its usual context, with the subsequent effect being that the character or action is no longer to be perceived as wholly self-evident. Here '[s]trangeness that does not betray and sell us has a wholly different effect. It makes the beholder look up; it seems artful, not artificial; it reveals its own quality in its otherness'⁷⁹ There is a sense of incompleteness and indirection where the alienation can be seen for what it is, and the world can be revealed in a different light.

In the strike action, boundaried by the picket, the familiar is made strange through a similar process, people are on campus but displaced from offices and teaching spaces. The teach-outs evinced a different type of pedagogical space, one more open to question and critique, which does not follow the prescribed curriculum. Instead, there is an immediate curriculum responding to the local politics of the Students' Union and challenges to joint working. Crucially it is one that is more politically charged and anticipates action. The campus changed into a site of emergence, pregnant with many possibilities. At the same time it was also a space of uncertainty, anxiety, guilt; all of which had the potential to lead to either alienation or solidarity. These again were entangled concepts which, when enmeshed, have a

⁷⁵ Emily Hume, "The Sussex picket line [. . .]".

⁷⁶ Máiréad Enright, "The Law of University Protest: Notes from the UK," *Critical Legal Thinking* (blog), 12 December 2013, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/12/12/law-university-protest-notes-uk/>.

⁷⁷ "Code of Practice on Picketing", 10.

⁷⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 6 - 7.

⁷⁹ Bloch et. al., "Entfremdung, Verfremdung." 123.

temporal spatial enactment that both suspends those caught in it, and reveals new ways of observing the world, causing subsequent changes in action.

Here, it is worth noting further ways that strike spaces cannot be read as entirely inclusive, and may themselves alienate. Many spaces of picketing and protest can be justifiably criticised for being ableist. Pickets can be inaccessible spaces where people are required to stand in the cold for long periods of time. Potential anxiety and conflict may alienate some from wanting to be involved in such public demonstrations. Academic rhetoric of teach-outs may not be accessible to those outside of the disciplines they originate in. Cultural differences, particularly for international students, can exclude as well as the aforementioned concerns around visas. While organisers and participants may try to account for such things where possible, the structural inequalities and intersectional oppressions within the institution are unavoidably replicated to some extent within the heterotopia of the strike action itself.

Discussions on the picket line indicated that some of those who at first wished to keep a distance from the strike, who felt alienated from the action, felt themselves instead drawn into it. They became entangled through turning up once, enticed by social media, sometimes drawn in by guilt of being absent from work but yet not having made a visible stand. They moved from a position of being participants alienated by the strike to being in solidarity with it. This sometimes occurred through the estrangement caused by the strike action. Observing debate on the picket line, a number of participants noted they became uncomfortable staying away from campus during the strike action, and found a sense of belonging which surprised them when joining picket lines and attending events.

This unexpectedness, this estrangement, was transformative but not absolute. Strike participants may have been caught in moments of solidarity and belonging, but also were concerned for their students, and some were troubled over the compromises they had made. Some strike participants sent materials for students to self-study in their absence, not feeling they could completely disrupt students' learning through the strike, and put in additional labour that they would not be paid for as long as they were absent. There was a sense of potential alienation from the solidarity of the strike through revealing such compromise, but a need for confession and seeking the solidarity and recognition of what sacrifices have or could be made. The space was one of transformation, but this was not necessarily unilinear or absolute. Caught in this net of enmeshed solidarity and alienation, strike participants develop a nuanced understanding of themselves and others, of the limits they placed on themselves, and the pressures from different angles they acquiesced to within the liminal space between striking and working. This was a time of great uncertainty. No one knew when or if the strike would reach its conclusion, and when it did what the impact would be when it ended. Allegiances forged in this time between colleagues may have an isolating legacy within departments where there was a split between those striking and those who were not. The strike's legacy was considered in discussion on the picket line with both excitement and anxiety.

Estrangement on the teach-outs happening on the pickets was aesthetic as well as political and social. We are 'removed from an alienating landscape [which] itself is wounded and covered with growing uniformity by an abstractly organizing technology, which has no relation to it.'⁸⁰ Here, the picket line designated a number of borders and edges, a sense of difference, liminality and boundary. It was the geographical edge of the protest at the opening where students come from the bus and train stop, but also the edge of the countryside, of Stamner park, of trees and grass (see figure 1). There was a wilding to activities on the picket, a sense of being out of the institutional buildings and spaces, which is reinforced by the neutrality of the undergrowth, and the proximity of a more natural and less hierarchical world.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

The event was further compounded by the snow on campus, which made the space of the campus even more strange and inhospitable to those protesting, but also generated more solidarity and determination between those willing to brave the weather.



[figure 1 © OpenStreetMap Contributors]

Alienation and estrangement are bound together in the moment by a sense of the alien and of the external, but they embody opposing forms of experience. Alienation removes participants from the active now, and estrangement brings participants into the now. Moments of estrangement are created in the learning space of the picket; compared to a classroom the strangeness of the outside learning environment facilitates an opening up to new ideas. Estrangement enforces a reduction of hierarchy and creation of community essential to establishing what Giroux views as a critical pedagogy that tries to resist modes of cultural reproduction.⁸¹ The strike action can be seen as actively changing how time is experienced on campus. Giroux notes that the future of universities rests on their ability to be a public space with the capacity to slow time down in order to question the powers that limit future ideas of democracy, and challenge the idea of a corporate university operating on accelerated time, displaying social agency with individualistic consumerism.⁸²

The readjustment to this new and strange space has been an ongoing theme on the picket lines for all involved. This complex temporal-spatiality consists of different experiences of 'Now', and a conscious rejection of the managerial now. In moments of alienation on the picket, staff struggle not to check emails. Over-worked, stressed and unappreciated they discuss the strangeness of not working, and of time outside with a chance to discuss matters freely with diverse members of the academic community. In moments of estrangement that throw them into the active 'Now' some reflect on leaving their jobs, others celebrate the opportunity to speak with other staff and students, some plan further mechanisms of resistance. This is not necessarily an interruption of academic time. People on the picket plan new projects, discuss the development of new archives, interdisciplinary perspectives on politics are discussed, students are engaged in teach-outs, new professional relationships are forged. It is a reaction to

⁸¹ Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, 5 - 6.

⁸² Henry A. Giroux, "Youth, Higher Education, and the Crisis of Public Time: Educated Hope and the Possibility of a Democratic Future," *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 148.

the alienating process of the marketisation of higher education resulting in an 'uninviting, unhappy, and involuntary externality, which in no way relates to our being'⁸³ where we have been commodified, reified and made anonymous to each other.

Performing Estrangement

The intersectional roles of the Students' Union and Trade Unions created spatial temporal areas of resistance on campus, and within their own structures, heterotopias within heterotopias, the creation of which is a productive process. The picket line became a classroom, and the Students' Union became a hub of the intersection between trade union and Students' Union and the broader community, who had a contract with UCU to hand out tea, coffee and food vouchers to their space for staff on the picket lines. These spaces took many temporal forms, from meetings responding to changes or threats, to contracts or fees, to a picket line, a protest, occupation, or other forms of direct action: all temporary occupations of space.

Many events were organised by of UCU members. Indoor events happened in Students' Union spaces as staff were not permitted to enter their place of work while on strike to use the empty classrooms, another process of exclusion. The decision to support the strike in this form by the Students' Union had to be voted through their democratic processes, and strike events managed around their existing programme of student and society events. This demonstrated the need for intersectionality between Trade Union-organised events with the Students' Union, and the broader community within which the strike action was taking place. Outside organisations which came to present at the organised teach-ins and debates included: ACORN Brighton Renters' Union, the Green Party, Black Lives Matter (where the teach out was by Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of the movement, members of BLM UK, Decolonise Sussex and I, Too, Am Sussex) and local poetry collectives.⁸⁴

These events, run by a self-organised group of UCU members, had their own rules, regulations and boundaries. They were meant to be a space for staff who were striking and community groups to come together to provide room for debate. Staff who had not been participating in the strike action were unable to speak at these events. Clear guidance was available written by these UCU members: the space was for strike events run, facilitated and or organised by staff on strike or those supporting the strike but unable to take strike action because they were not employed by the university, such as students and other community groups.⁸⁵ In addition it was clear that the events were to be complementary to the picket line action:

We request that events relate in some way to the strike or the context in which it must be understood (i.e. the current academic and cultural climate in the neoliberal academy) ... geared towards actively seeking to foster environments - and discussions - around solidarity, resistance and community around the strike and the issues surrounding it. Our focus is on the strike and envisioning the types of university spaces and cultures we want to foster.⁸⁶

The above can be seen as a 'call to both disorder and to study';⁸⁷ creating spaces of productive debate, conflict and potentiality, located in the heterotopia that helps define, redefine and challenge spaces for debate and information exchange. This is not just done through traditional teach-out lecture/seminar style, but also poetry readings, workshops and sing-a-longs. There is

⁸³ Bloch et. al., "Entfremdung, Verfremdung", 123.

⁸⁴ "Timetable of Strike Events."

⁸⁵ "Timetable of Strike Events."

⁸⁶ "Timetable of Strike Events."

⁸⁷ Webb, "Bolt-Holes and Breathing Spaces in the System", 103.

a connection between learning and creating social change in this environment that is constitutive of a critical utopian pedagogy.⁸⁸

Through these events, strike participants become a surprise to themselves, renewed through protest, a reflection of how the UCU strike action reaches beyond the pensions dispute.⁸⁹ Momentary acts took place, such as the performative ‘Race to the Bottom’ where staff and students, dressed either as ‘fat cats’ or as staff and students chained together with paper chains of debt and oppression, ran from the top of the campus to the bottom. In these moments, estrangement is about surprise as well as dislocation. This is an emotional response to the world being not as you expected, a re-sensing of the aesthetics of power. This process of being ‘startled awake’ through new information, alongside the openness for dialogue during discussion, creates alternative spaces for new ways of thinking through alternative teaching. Here, the temporary performance also reaches towards the infinite, longing for a time when things will change. Here, heterotopia can begin to ‘function at full capacity,’⁹⁰ as this estrangement process provides a break with traditional time. Whether pulled towards alienation or estrangement during the strike there is an interruption of managerial time that is divided up by a marketised necessity. The strike measures and creates time in iterations that are disruptive; leaving periods for reflecting and engaging in a known space in new ways.

From the collective there also emerged a strike choir. This recorded songs, both original and reworkings of pop songs with new lyrics. Due to copyright restrictions, they were only able to share recordings of original work, or songs that were out of copyright. Cher inadvertently became the face of the strike with the popularity of the reworking of *Believe* into ‘Do you believe in life after work?/I can feel something inside me say/I do because the union’s strong enough, oh!’⁹¹ These lyrics found their way onto the internet through memes, the placards carried on marches up and down the country, and even into the titles of academic articles.⁹² In the same way that the picket code restricted gestures on a bodily level, the singing liberated. There was even a full ‘cherobics’ routine written to *Believe (In life after work)* to keep people warm and motivated on the main picket at Sussex.⁹³ This multi-modal resistance allowed a wide variety of staff and students from different disciplines to express their resistance, and also formed an intersection of UCU and the students, where student protestors, and the Students’ Union provided a motivational role throughout the month of strike action.

With the choir, strike on Sussex campus had its own soundtrack, perhaps one anthem being “Activism and the Academy”. The song is an original ode by a UCU rep to the University of Sussex VC Adam Tickell. This riffs on the title of Tickell’s own essay ‘Reflections on “Activism and the Academy”’. In this essay Tickell wrote of his time as a critical geographer where he states: ‘[t]o reiterate, capitalism is the enemy, but neoliberalism seems to me to be worse than social democracy. Perhaps we should set our sights a little lower than capitalism and attempt to slay the neoliberal beast.’⁹⁴ The song highlights not just the pension issue, but broader issues of precarity, high workloads, staff distrust and university priorities that do not match the needs of staff and students:

Professor I preferred your earlier publications,
Your critiques of neoliberal exploitation,

⁸⁸ Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014): 56 - 74.

⁸⁹ Bhambra, “In Defence of the Public University.”

⁹⁰ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 6

⁹¹ Sussex Strike Collective, *The Little Book of Strike for USS Songs*, 2018. 161.

⁹² Bergfeld, “Do You Believe in Life after Work?”

⁹³ “Timetable of Strike Events.”

⁹⁴ Adam Tickell, “Reflections on ‘Activism and the Academy’” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 1995): 235–37, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d130235>.

The silent violence of individual pension schemes,
And now you're just another cog in the privatisation machine?

...

Mr Tickell, it seems that you've abruptly ceased,
Discussing 'jungle law' and 'neoliberal beasts',
And the destruction of collegiality,
Professor Tickell, do you still believe in the public university?

Activism and the academy
Students and staff in solidarity!
Activism and the academy
Save our pensions, fight precarity

It was widely tweeted and now has over 2000 listens on Soundcloud, as well as being performed on the picket and in Library Square.⁹⁵

In addition, a group of UCU members held a central collection of lyric sheets on a googledoc that they would update regularly with newly rewritten pop song lyrics from across the movement, totalling over 30 songs. These songsheets would allow people to join in whether on the picket, on Library Square, or simply in the pub afterwards. Estrangement was not only apparent by the way in which the space of the campus was reformulated, but how the words of commonly known pop songs were altered. Bonnie Tyler's *I Need a Hero* became 'We need a pension/ We're holding out for a pension 'til the end of the strike/It's gotta be fair/ And a reasonable share/ Of the wages I've earned in my life.' To the tune of *Hit Me Baby One More Time* by Britney Spears the choir sang 'VCs, VCs, how were we supposed to know, our pensions weren't safe here... See you on the picket line!' These songs brought people together in new ways. Again themes of distrust, exhaustion and overwork were prevalent: '[t]his workload model is killing me, I'm overworked I need some sleep!'⁹⁶ *What's Up* by the Four Non-Blondes was rewritten:

So many years and my job is still
Trying to get up that great big hill of hope
For a fucking pension
I realised quickly when I knew I should
That their valuation was no good ...
And I'll scream from the top of my lungs, 'Where's my pension?!'⁹⁷

When hearing these songs by Britney, Cher et. al. again on the radio or in a shop or pub, there will be, for many involved in the choir or singalongs, a superimposition of those adapted lyrics in which the temporality of the strike maintains its forever-ness. Here we have a complex relationship of place, politics and music emerging. The rewriting of the songs are insidious, hilarious, vicious and intelligent. There is an intent to persuade, inform and provoke. These pop songs were not written for the purpose in which they are being used here, most popular music being largely constructed for the purpose of sales and capital exchange, with any resistant messages becoming appropriated as selling points.⁹⁸ Through estrangement of their performance on the picket, and the reorientation of lyrics towards union solidarity and the pensions strike, and the attack on the public university, these songs instead become channels of communication for activists. These protest songs are both persuasive and expressive in their rhetoric and act as a mode of expression that is both entertaining and informative. This allows

⁹⁵ "Sussex Strike 2018," SoundCloud, accessed 27 January 2019, <https://soundcloud.com/sussexstrikesongs>.

⁹⁶ Sussex Strike Collective, *The Little Book of Strike for USS Songs*.

⁹⁷ Sussex Strike Collective.

⁹⁸ Tara Brabazon, "Music: Politics, Resistance and Protest" in *Popular Music: Topics, Trends & Trajectories* (SAGE Books): 233–40. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446251409.n41>.

for protest songs to communicate within movements, but also between movements, and across different generations within and without.⁹⁹

This helps both the collective formation of identity, and orders and reorganises structures of feeling in a constructive manner.¹⁰⁰ The act of singing becomes part of the gestures of how one enters and leaves the heterotopian space of the campus on strike. As seen in relation to the above, lyrics are also an expression of anger, where on the picket line there is no place for showing frustration for fear it becomes interpreted as intimidation and breaking of the *Code of Picketing*, these songs, through humour, make space for angry statements. Their humour belies hurt, humiliation, fear and dismay that underlies the need for this action in the first place, what Bloch may refer to as the expression of a 'brutal but merry rage.'¹⁰¹ These songs also extend the heterotopia of the strike out of the rhythmic heterochrony of the scheduled strike times, members met in Library Square to sing, in studios to record, and in the pub to drink and solidify social relations outside of the university limits.

National and Local Struggles

This complex space of crisis and deviation represents a multiplicity of spaces in one, and Sussex local and national struggles became jointly represented on one campus. When the University of Sussex VC, Adam Tickell, stepped up to take on the role of lead negotiator for UUK, Duncan Michie, of Sussex's Labour society stated: 'Sussex VC, Adam Tickell, is the only VC in the country representing the UUK in negotiations... This means that the fight against UUK has made Sussex its national battle ground.'¹⁰² It was not long before a Facebook page called for a National Protest to take place on the University of Sussex Campus stating 'The University is a Factory - SHUT IT DOWN!'¹⁰³ A slogan that both recognises and mocks the University as a space of commodified production, but also sees within this commodified power structure the very possibility for traditional forms of resistance to bring it to a halt.

It is worth noting that the strike also nationally sparked a debate on refunds for students for the time staff were absent, encouraging a further narrative of commodification. This financial pressure came from a subset of students (and their parents) demanding refunds on classes missed.¹⁰⁴ The complexity of whether the strike financially hit the students, taxpayers or striking lecturers losing their wages was in question throughout. Certainly it would appear that the institutions themselves would not be losing money, but in fact be saving on labour not paid for during the strike. The issue with this is that one outcome of the strike action was to reframe the debate around the marketisation of education, whereas this demand for refunds placed the student in the role of consumer, rather than fighting against it.

⁹⁹ Ron Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 161.

¹⁰⁰ Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements*, 161

¹⁰¹ Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 41.

¹⁰² Jamie Bailey and Kyle Farrell, "Students from across the UK Are Planning to Hold a National Demo at Sussex University", *The Tab* (8 March 2018). <https://thetab.com/uk/sussex/2018/03/08/students-from-across-the-uk-are-planning-to-hold-a-national-demo-at-sussex-university-26078>.

¹⁰³ "Break UUK - Win the Strike! National Demo at Sussex," accessed June 26, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1797017697265896/>.

¹⁰⁴ Sam Meadows, "Students Demand Tuition Fee Refunds: Here's How to Complain" *The Telegraph* (23 February 2018) <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/student-money/students-demand-tuition-fee-refunds-complain/>> accessed 2 September 2018; 'Strike-Hit Students Set to Get Compensation, Minister Says' *The Independent* (28 February 2018) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/university-strikes-compensation-lecturers-students-sam-gyimah-direct-minister-latest-a8232746.html>> accessed 2 September 2018; 'Unpicking Strikes, Tuition Fees, and (Possible) Refunds | Wonkhe | Analysis' *Wonkhe* <<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/unpicking-strikes-tuition-fees-and-possible-refunds/>> accessed 2 September 2018.

This march and rally succeeded in their stated aim of shutting down the university. However, it was not the march itself that shut the university down, but the threat of it combined with the risk averse approach of the university, action that can be seen looking back to previous strikes and occupations. Students organising this action only had access to Facebook groups and not an all staff or student mail base.¹⁰⁵ The event was well attended despite the university closure, and students organising put this down to the actions of Sussex Senior Management raising the profile of the event within the university by emailing all students and staff about the official closure:

What a day, big up to everyone who came along. Just wanted to say a big special thank you to University of Sussex for mass emailing every Sussex student with information about the (unauthorised) demo. More reach than we could have ever dreamed of, we couldn't have done it without you!¹⁰⁶

This event was listed on Facebook as co-hosted and promoted by a number of different groups including Climate Action Movement, Sussex Supports the Strike, Sussex Friends of Palestine Society, Fossil Free Campaign, Bristol Student-Staff Solidarity, The Free University of Sheffield, Warwick For Free Education, UCL Free Education, Newcastle University Labour Society, Free Education Sussex, Occupy Sussex, University of Sussex Labour Society, University of Brighton Labour Society and the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.¹⁰⁷

This national event had a reach beyond Sussex and physically brought more individuals into the heterotopia from across the country. It solidified further the campus as representing multiple places in one, many organisations seeing it as a focus for anger in the dispute, and what the dispute symbolised more broadly in terms of an attack on workers' rights and the public university. It captured the interest of groups who were not just concerned with the university but the larger context of social and environmental injustice. This 'tentacular entanglement'¹⁰⁸ of ideas, organisations and causes shows the sympoietic process at play, where the heterotopia self-sustains through its interaction with the 'the rest of society',¹⁰⁹ those not directly in the heterotopia. Here, actions that happen within and reach beyond the strike can be seen as 'practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen - yet'¹¹⁰

We see how heterotopia of the strike has a relationship to other struggles. The heterotopia is *sympoietic* in nature. Haraway offers Dempster's definition to us of both systems in *Staying with the Troubles*. Sympoietic systems are 'collectively-producing systems that do have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed between components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change.'¹¹¹ As such within heterotopias there is the sympoietic creation of new heterotopias that maintains a space of resistance in tension with the heterotopia itself. These heterotopias within heterotopias influence, merge and disrupt. There is a necessary conflict and critique that goes both inwards and outwards in order to maintain the space as heterotopian. Without this, it will stagnate and become the same as the normative society which it resists.

¹⁰⁵ "BREAKING: All Sussex Lessons on Thursday Cancelled," University of Sussex, 13 March 2018, <https://thetab.com/uk/sussex/2018/03/13/breaking-all-sussex-lessons-have-been-cancelled-on-thursday-26443>.

¹⁰⁶ "Break UUK - Win the Strike! National Demo at Sussex."

¹⁰⁷ "Break UUK - Win the Strike! National Demo at Sussex."

¹⁰⁸ Donna Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene". *e-flux Journal* #75 (September 2016). Accessed 26 June 2018. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"

¹¹⁰ Donna Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking".

¹¹¹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press Books 2016). 32

The local actions merge with the national, and become-with resistance to other social injustices: an act of hopeful and angry solidarity across the disenfranchised. Such intersections can be seen when following the national march on Sussex Campus in which forty students occupied the East Slope construction site on campus demanding that 'Balfour Beatty, the construction company at work on the site, stop blacklisting trade union reps, and allow the trade union UNITE unhindered and unsupervised access to the construction site in order to allow workers to exercise their rights and unionise.'¹¹² Here, the heterotopia is extended deeper into the university, casting doubt on the ethical practices that in a material sense construct the future plans of the institution of the University of Sussex from bricks and mortar. The injustices that are suffered by those working in these spaces reveal they may be all the more vulnerable due to limitations on their right to unionise.

Here, the traditionally middle class issues of the strike are reconnected with the issues around the material production of the university buildings and spaces themselves. Narratives of resistance, while well meaning, still create often disproportionate invisibility on the grounds of gender, race and socio-economic status, ignoring the material and intellectual value of such contributions. Federici warns us if we wish to change the university in line with the public construction of a 'knowledge commons' that there is a need to question 'the material conditions of the production of the university, its history and its relation to the surrounding communities'¹¹³ and not just the academics within it. There is a need to consider how debate on knowledge production is insulated from the invisible work that sustains academic life, including labourers, cleaners, cafeteria workers and groundkeepers, as well as the colonisation of land upon which institutions are built.

This occupation was reported as having around 150 visitors, and was followed by a further set of demands.¹¹⁴ Students at this occupation also made demands about student rents, and linked the purpose of the strike directly with the desire for a better and freer education system in their statements:

The result of this strike will determine the future of UK universities. If students and staff win, we can look forward to a future of free education for the good of the many, not the few...If we lose, prospects are bleak. It's time to take on the bosses.¹¹⁵

As much as there is hope for the future embedded within these actions there is also the fear of futurelessness. By connecting with other struggles, this space is also linked with greater risk, and other narratives of fear that drive activism. These include climate change, the potentially devastating impact of austerity measures and the end of the public university. This occupation, however, was deemed unlawful by the university, and previous examples indicate that had the university gone to court, they would once more be successful in obtaining an injunction on the

¹¹² Katie Tobin and Jamie Bailey. "Over forty protesters are occupying new East Slope construction site." *The Tab* (15 March 2018). <https://thetab.com/uk/sussex/2018/03/15/forty-students-occupy-new-east-slope-accommodation-construction-site-26510>.

¹¹³ Silvia Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland, CA: Pm Press, 2018).

¹¹⁴ Deniz Karaman, "150 New People Occupy East Slope Construction." *The Badger* (blog), 15 March 2018. <http://thebadgeronline.com/2018/03/150-new-people-occupy-east-slope-construction/>.

¹¹⁵ Sophia Marci. "Students stand with striking staff at Sussex University." *Brighton and Hove News* (blog), 15 March 2018.

grounds of trespass.¹¹⁶ Conditions were made difficult for students by withdrawing portaloos and cutting off heating on the site in an attempt to make them withdraw.¹¹⁷

The role of heterotopias is 'to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.'¹¹⁸ These spaces compensate for the disorder of the rest of society, creating laws and ways of living and being that are more desirable than what is happening. Such acts of occupation can be interpreted as struggles to reconfigure the ownership of the university, and new ways of creating social goods and collective production which work against government policies and management strategies of universities.¹¹⁹

Within these spaces we can see generative sympoietic processes at work. Here, new boundaried areas are created inside the boundaried striking campus through the proliferation of narratives of struggle outside of the strike. The occupation within the strike becomes a heterotopia within a heterotopia. The occupying students had decided that democracy should determine the gestures and rules that people had to obey within this space:

It was democratic we had a big meeting. We're trying not to get too many people on the floor at one time as we're concerned about safety and we're respecting the building and were absolutely not doing any damage. Also, there's a no alcohol, no drugs, and no smoking policy unless they are prescribed. People have been planning this since 8 am last night. [sic]¹²⁰

Guidelines were set and adhered to, these were communicated to 'the rest of society'¹²¹ outside of the heterotopia in order to further legitimate the claims made by students in this space. In practice, students did succeed in setting up a meeting between Unite and Balfour Beattie, leaving the site after four days on Sunday morning and declaring their actions a success.¹²² In addition to this partial victory, students also felt that they had succeeded in demonstrating solidarity with the staff and sending a message to the senior management of the university which 'highlighted the failure of Adam Tickell to support his staff and students, and sent a strong message to Tickell urging him to support the UCU.'¹²³

This is a different type of interruption of space than the temporary march or picket, a different rhythm of spatio-temporality within the heterotopia. Such events created an alternative type of interdisciplinary space where ideas such as performance, celebration, discussion and co-habitation could be practiced and learnt.¹²⁴ Here, the outcome of the strike action led to occupation and a win on another front, extending the utopian process outside the initial boundaries of the heterotopias.

Impact of Strikes Beyond the Strike: Forever Strike

¹¹⁶ *University of Sussex v Protestors* [2010] 16 E.G. 106 (C.S.) (n.d.); *University of Sussex v Protestors* (EWHC, 29 March 2013) (n.d.).

¹¹⁷ Tom Robinson, "Students Claim Victory as Occupation Ends after Heating Cut Off." *Brighton and Hove News* (blog), 22 March 2018. <http://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2018/03/22/students-claim-victory-as-occupation-ends-after-heating-cut-off/>.

¹¹⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 8.

¹¹⁹ Brenna Bhandar, "A Right to the University." *LRB Blog* (10 December 2013). Accessed 28 June 2018. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2013/12/10/brenna-bhandar/a-right-to-the-university/>.

¹²⁰ Karaman, "150 New People Occupy East Slope Construction."

¹²¹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias, 'Des Espace Autres.'"

¹²² Robinson, "Students Claim Victory as Occupation Ends after Heating Cut Off."

¹²³ *Sussex Occupation (@SussexOccupied)*. "2. We sent a powerful message of support to striking staff, highlighted the failure of Adam Tickell to support his staff and students, and sent a strong message to Tickell urging him to support the UCU". Twitter, 18 March 2018.

<https://twitter.com/SussexOccupied/status/975475227441422338>.

¹²⁴ Enright, "The Law of University Protest."

For Bloch, reality is incomplete and breaking at the edges,¹²⁵ and necessarily so is any heterotopia. At the edges of the heterotopia, people enter and leave, those on the outside come face to face with those inside, conflict is both necessary and a driver of change. Gestures and permissions can be formal or informal when it comes to being in these spaces of resistance, however the nature of how Trade Unions and Students' Unions intersect and act towards their members in relation to their spaces will have a significant impact on who is present in their heterotopias, and who is absent. It may dictate whether they are able to reach towards a critical utopian horizon, or whether their ideas fade into abstraction.

Following the UCU vote to set up a Joint Expert Panel in April 2018, Universities UK formally withdrew its proposal to replace the guaranteed pension, although what this is to be replaced with still remains to be seen at the time of this article going to press (the USS consultation with the employers will continue until the end of February 2019).¹²⁶ However, in this heterotopian space on campus the intersection of Trade Unions and Students' Unions allow this space to be reconfigured and extended beyond the initial point of conflict, of the UCU and UUK pensions dispute, and beyond this into other matters of the public university, and broad economic injustices. The strike embodied working collectively towards the future of a 'better world' through a critical process, and one that is not for purely economic gain nor upholding capitalist values.¹²⁷ If heterotopias can be seen to be reaching towards this not-yet place, this becomes the anticipation of a utopian place and time.

There is an afterlife to the activity of the 2018 strike; it continues to disrupt and its spirit is carried on the ongoing rebellious and critical modes of the participants. An example of this can be seen in the interruption of democratic time which happened at both the UCU and National Union of Students (NUS) Conferences in very different ways. This is an example of a necessary conflict and critique that goes both inwards and outwards in this strike, in order to maintain the space as heterotopian, without this it will stagnate and become the same as 'the real space of society'.¹²⁸

Around 150 NUS student delegates, including those from the University of Sussex Students' Union, occupied the stage at NUS Conference 2018 after the guillotine fell on discussion about decriminalising sex work and abortion in Northern Ireland.¹²⁹ This conference is the main policy making body of NUS. This disruption was a demonstration of different ways of decision making from those already being used. It was a performative moment; an expression of solidarity; a rejection of what they saw as the restrictive and traditional forms of democratic decision making still in place at NUS conference. The student delegates operated through theatrical estrangement. They did not need technology to project their voices. One person spoke to those around them, then multiple people around them would repeat the phrases louder so the whole stage could hear. They used consensus decision making and responded to reasoned discussion. Tweets noted that they were 'calling out the way that bureaucracy has stopped us from passing any radical or meaningful policies'.¹³⁰ Students occupying the stage

¹²⁵ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 117.

¹²⁶ Matt Waddup, "A Ten Point Update on the USS Dispute." Accessed 28 January 2019. <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/9854/A-ten-point-update-on-the-USS-dispute>.

¹²⁷ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 5.

¹²⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 3.

¹²⁹ Daniel Gayne, "NUS Conference Disrupted as Delegates Occupy Stage", *Varsity* (28 March 2018). <https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/15239>.

¹³⁰ Lola Olufemi, (@CUSUWO). "The occupation of the stage is the most important thing that has happened at this conf. Not only standing with pregnant ppl denied basic healthcare & sex workers - but calling out the way that bureaucracy has stopped us from passing any radical or meaningful policies. #NUSNC18". Twitter, 28 March 2018.

were putting to use skills they had been learning at the occupations at their own campuses during the strike action. The strike has had an impact on their skills for challenging assumed norms and processes of democracy: bringing the critical perspectives they learned from campus conflicts to the organisation of their own national movement. The act of the strike and the occupation has allowed radical practice learned on campus to achieve its aim of spreading 'beyond the campus in a dual process of provocative rupture'.¹³¹ At the 2019 NUS Conference changes were made to running orders and election processes in response to this. Democratic processes to work more smoothly, with a positive impact on the amount of policy passed and discussed.

Disruption at the NUS conference shut down established democratic practices to open up the possibility for a different type of democracy when the grassroots took over the temporal-spatiality of the conference stage. In contrast, a staff walkout at the UCU conference (when members of the executive committee refused to hear motions of no confidence in the leadership) meant that the UCU conference space was left vacant, democracy was interrupted and not replaced with an alternative but instead with a void. There may be some dispute as to whether the mergers of unions to form UCU have led to a revitalisation of the union movement, or whether they have also created a problem of democracy within said unions,¹³² one that is still to be resolved. The disruption from this has initiated a grassroots movement within UCU going under the banner of 'Our UCU' and 'UCU Rank and File':

We UCU elected delegates voted repeatedly in line with the advice of our Congress Business Committee to hear motions criticising the General Secretary which were in order. Unfortunately the General Secretary and a narrow majority of the National Executive Committee refused to accept the right of Congress to debate these motions.¹³³

The leadership's approach has been heavily criticised on social media and by branches. However, action at the UCU conference was also an extension of democratic processes which had been formed during the strike, when the leadership of UCU was held to account by branches in order to stop them accepting a revised offer from UUK. It has been a time of increased membership engagement, and offers the potential to renew approaches to democracy in a way that responds to a more active membership base.

*

This struggle is far from over either off or on campus, and the space of resistance operates in different ways. Eyerman notes that music and song can maintain a movement even when it no longer has a visible presence in the form of organisations, leaders or demonstrations, and also notes the importance of music when it comes to preparing the emergence of a new movement.¹³⁴ On Sussex campus, the strike songs are still sometimes heard on Library Square, meetings are ongoing, the UCU and student groups are taking forward their manifesto for change, beyond this there has been disruption to established democratic processes at both the NUS National Conference and the UCU Congress this year. We therefore see conflict and

https://twitter.com/CUSUWO/status/979002131893096448?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.varsity.co.uk%2Fnews%2F15239.

¹³¹ Webb, "Bolt-Holes and Breathing Spaces in the System."

¹³² J. David Edelstein and Malcolm Warner, *Comparative Union Democracy: Organisation and Opposition in British and American Unions* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1975): 374.

¹³³ University and College Union. "#OurUCU – Statement with Full List of Delegate Signatures Following Shutdown of Congress." *UCU Left* (blog), 2 June 2018. <http://uculeft.org/2018/06/ourucu-statement/>.

¹³⁴ Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements*, 71.

critique reaching inwards into reinvigorated union movements (autopoietic) as well as outwards (sympoietic).

This temporal-spatial understanding of resistance must be seen as an entangled form, capable of being limited and unlimited both spatially and temporally. These are spaces that are self-critical, but also reach for a concrete utopia: one that is collectively imagined and ethically bound. The original aim of the strike, to protect pensions, has been linked with the bigger picture of the threat to the idea of the public university and the university as a public good. Both on and off Campus the intersection of Trade and Students' Unions are full of potential, and thus a location for a critical utopian process reaching towards a better world. Their intersection with the 'rest of society' continues to have a transformative impact beyond the strike: holding up a mirror to society, and to themselves, to instigate change.

The Sussex strike Twitter page is still labelled 'Forever Strike'. It is still there, poised and ready. While the latest ballot on pay and equality did not reach the required threshold for action, the forever strike slogan reaches ever forwards, transforming the interruptive moment of strike action into an ongoing movement of resistance and solidarity. The 2019 UCU women's strike event for International Women's day saw some involved in the strike action coalescing around ongoing matters of inequality and discrimination. It seems that, in the undercommons and beyond, resistance continues.

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